6: Sugiura & Befu E-4, 5 (1951) 1962
AB6 Ainu AB6

Kinship Organization of the Saru Ainu[1]

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The ethnological importance of the culture of the Ainu, perhaps overshadowed by the biological significance of this archaic Caucasoid people, has never received proper attention in Western anthropological literature. This also reflects the fact that the aboriginal culture of the Ainu, as Takakura (1960) has shown, had begun to disintegrate long before modern times. Early in the nineteenth century the Japanese government tightened its political control over the Ainu, and this policy, together with the adoption of agriculture by this basically hunting-and-gathering people, increasing intermarriage with the neighboring Japanese, and the adoption of the Japanese language for everyday conversation, so altered the Ainu culture that a study of the aboriginal conditions is now extremely difficult.

Nevertheless, research in all aspects of Ainu culture is being carried on—primarily by Japanese scholars. In 1951 the Japanese Society of Ethnology sent a team of anthropologists to the Saru River valley, in southwestern Hokkaido, to study the Ainu of this area, using modern anthropological techniques. This field work, in which the senior author participated, has thrown considerable light on the nature of the Ainu kinship structure, about which very little had been known. A unique feature of the Ainu kinship system which came to be understood at this time is that men trace their descent patrilineally and women matrilineally. Although this characteristic had been noted in passing by Takakura (1944: 54-55) and Natori (1945: 114), a full understanding of this unusual descent system, particularly in relation to other aspects of the social organization, had to await the 1951 field investigation. The purpose of this paper is to outline the kinship organization of the Saru Ainu with special emphasis on the nature of their descent system.

Family

Although the contemporary Ainu family tends to be extended, in aboriginal times the nuclear family seems to have been the preponderant pattern, with occasional coresidence of a widowed kinsman. In the rare cases of polygyny, each wife, with her children, had her own dwelling.

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INTRODUCTION

remained intact, and the Japanese religious beliefs and practices made little headway.

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[162]
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The basic social unit among the Ainu was the simple family. A group of families formed a settlement or hamlet (*kotan*): the number of families in a settlement varied from one to over twenty, but was usually less than ten. Settlements were made near rivers, and sites were usually selected for their proximity to fishing grounds, especially the spawning grounds of the dog-salmon.

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A settlement or group of settlements constituted a politically autonomous local group, the unity and integrity of which was expressed by the common ownership of salmon spawning beds and common participation in certain rituals.[1] Members of the local groups regarded the river valley as their territory, and had exclusive rights to exploit its resources, which they defended against the trespass of outsiders. For all economic purposes, the local group was self-sufficient.

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Among the fishing rituals practised by the Ainu the most important was the dog-salmon ritual (*kamuichep kamuinomi*). The elders of each household in the local group, owning common salmon spawning grounds, joined under their headman to perform the rites. There was a ritual to ensure the success of the coming salmon run, a first salmon ritual, and a ritual to return the spirits of the captured salmon to the land of the kamui.

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Hunting, particularly bear hunting, required strict adherence to ritual. The bear itself is a deity and the Bear Ceremony is the best known of all Ainu rituals.

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Postscript by B. Z. Seligman

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It is well known that, from the earliest historical times, the Ainu were gradually driven north by the Japanese in Honshu. Frontier posts were established in the northern province of Mutsu to 'keep out the barbarians'. Sansom[2] states that in 805 a memorial to the

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[1] I received the following information from Mr Watanabe after further researches in 1957: In the Tokapchi district these groups are called *shine itokpa uko kor utar* (one and the same male ancestor-mark together possessing people). Characteristics of the group are: strong group consciousness, exclusive claim to the resources of the river basin, and collective ritual. There is no single authority, at least in normal times.—B.Z.S.

[2] G. B. Sansom, *Japan, a Short Cultural History*, The Cresset Press, London, 1931.

[p.7]

II

GROUP STRUCTURE

The Household.

● 594 591 The basic unit of Ainu social life was the simple family consisting of a father, a mother and their unmarried children. The post-marital residence was usually virilocal; namely a son, when he got married, built a new house of his own near his parent's. But there was no rigid rule of virilocal residence. Thus a man sometimes went to live with his wife's father's territorial group (pp. 13 and 17).

592 [342] [354] The Ainu dwelling house, *chise*, was built for permanent use, wooden-framed, rectangular in plan and single-roomed. All the occupants of each house constituted one household, sleeping, cooking and eating together around a fireplace at the centre of the room.

Table *1*.

		Local Groups in Upper Tokapchi						Local Groups in Satnai			
	Names of Local Groups (ca. 1880-1885)	Kuttarashi	Nitmap	Pipaushi	Kumaushi	Sanenkore	Moseushi	Nupokomap	Munhunki	Urekarip	Total
	Total Number of Member Houses Identified	8	7	6	8	4	11	9	3	3	59
Composition of Occupants of Each House	Simple family	7	5	4	5	4	9	8	3	3	48
	A widow plus her eldest son's family	1			1						2
	A widow plus her unmarried children		1	1							2
	A widow (? plus her unmarried children)						1	1			2
	A widower plus his eldest son's family						1				1
	A widower (? plus his unmarried children)				1						1
	An unmarried woman		1								1
	An unmarried man				1						1
	Unmarried siblings			1							1